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ABSTRACT

A study of elementary school foreign language programs in eight states yielded information about the status and design of language immersion, revitalized foreign language in the elementary schools (FLES), and foreign language experience (FLEX) programs. Immersion programs consist of the usual curriculum content presented entirely in a second language, begun at any grade level. Research has shown consistently good immersion program results in English, second language, and subject area performance. Potential disadvantages include lack of materials, a shortage of adequately trained teachers, and costs. FLES programs, providing before- and after-school language instruction, have been revitalized and now emphasize spoken language more than they used to. New directions in FLES include language presentation in a meaningful context, less emphasis on grammar, increased use of visuals and realia, and increased use of physical activity. Interesting instructional material for FLES is still inadequate. FLEX programs are self-contained, non-articulated programs designed to introduce students informally to language study. Their objectives are to strengthen language programs and retention, motivate children and give them a sound basis for second language selection, encourage mastery of a limited amount of language material, increase intercultural sensitivity, and instill awareness of career use of foreign language skills. A chart of immersion programs in the United States is included. (MSE)

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IMMERSION AND OTHER INNOVATIONS IN U.S. ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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AND

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"Es facil. Es facil!" were the cries heard from the first graders learning a complex mathematical task. The teacher was at the board demonstrating how to draw a three-dimensional box and the children were eagerly reproducing the geometric figure on their own slates. "Miren me. Hagan una caja, y una linea asi... Eschuchen--no es facil!" cautioned the teacher, making sure that they watched her and drew their lines carefully.

A typical first-grade math lesson was being taught in a public school, La Ballona Elementary in Culver City, California...but there was a difference. These American born English-speaking children were being taught math *in Spanish*, and were learning all their other subjects in the foreign language as well. With little extra effort, they were becoming fluent in Spanish as well as learning all the regular class material.

How can this be? Children learning a new language during their regular classes? Of course! It has long been known that young children approach second-language learning with an ease and naturalness that is not found in older learners. So why not take advantage of this asset? Without detracting from their regular school work, children can acquire a second language while learning other subject matter taught in that language. At least 13 school systems across the United States have adopted this idea and have started their own language immersion classes.

Immersion programs are not the only type of elementary-language programs in which there is currently a wave of renewed interest. The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL), with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, has become the unofficial clearinghouse for information on the types of foreign language classes that are being offered in elementary schools across the country.

The CAL investigators first surveyed elementary schools in eight states to find out how much early language instruction was going on and what teaching methods were being used. The survey covered 1,237 schools in California, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Of the 453 schools that responded, 18 percent reported that foreign language was being taught.

Investigators then visited schools with successful programs to gather information to develop step-by-step guidelines for parents, teachers, and administrators interested in starting foreign-language classes in their elementary schools. The innovative programs which were observed could generally be classified according to three categories: language immersion, revitalized foreign language in the elementary school, and foreign-language experience (FLEX).

LANGUAGE IMMERSION

The most dramatic approach to the teaching of languages in the elementary schools can be found in the immersion programs where children do learn to understand, speak, read and write in two languages, the second language and English. U.S. immersion programs were modeled after the extremely successful French-immersion programs which have been operating in Canada for the past 15 years. Immersion simply means a program in which the usual curriculum activities are conducted in a second language which is the *medium* of instruction rather than the object of

instruction. It can begin at any level--in kindergarten or the primary grades, where it is called early immersion, or in the middle grades where it is called late immersion. In different kinds of immersion programs the amount of time each day spent in the second language may also vary. In total immersion programs, the second language is used for the entire school day during the first two or three years of the program. In partial-immersion programs, instruction takes place in the second language for part (usually at least half) of the school day. It is important to remember that slight variations in immersion-program design can occur depending upon the needs or desires of an individual school district. However, even though there may be variations in the amount of time spent in the second language or the grade level at which formal English instruction is introduced, the basic concept and methodology remain the same.

From the minute the children arrive at school in the morning, they hear only the second language from the teacher. All classroom conversation and instructions are in the new language. In this way, children acquire the second language in a natural setting in situations such as: "I have hot lunch today," "Can we go out for recess?" "Give me the ball." "I want to be first!" "May I go to the bathroom?" The language instruction does not exist in a vacuum, but is an integral part of their daily lives. During the first few months students answer in English when the teacher speaks to them in the second language. Gradually, as their second-language skills improve, they start speaking the language with their teacher and friends.

Children show little anxiety about learning in another language because the things they learn are within their experience. They learn to speak and read about things they understand: in kindergarten, a visit to the zoo; in second grade, a lesson on magnets; in fifth grade, a lesson on United States geography.

The curriculum in an immersion program is basically the same as the curriculum in any elementary school. Students have reading, mathematics, language arts, science, social studies, art, music, and physical education. After two or three years in a total-immersion program, when children have acquired comprehension and can easily generate needed speech in the second language, English is introduced as a language arts subject for 30 minutes to an hour each day in the second or third grade. As the students progress through the middle grades, the amount of English is gradually increased until in grades five or six there is a balance of both the second language and English. The end result is that upon leaving a total-immersion program, students have not only completed the regular elementary curriculum, but are able to begin middle school or junior high school with bilingual skills sufficient to take subject content classes in either language.

Questions about achievement have been a common concern expressed by parents who fear that children in immersion programs would fall behind the traditional English only classes. Research from Canada, a country which has had many years of experience with French-immersion programs, has shown the positive effects of early immersion. Many studies have shown that immersion pupils achieve as well as or better than their monolingual peers in the content subjects, even though they have learned those subjects through the second language. The children do show a temporary lag in the development of their English language skills, but this lag is quickly made up once English-language arts instruction is introduced. The research on early immersion is not only reassuring about achievement,

but also indicates desirable side effects. Merrill Swain (1979) summarizes the research related to immersion programs in Canada for the past ten years:

> *Effects on English Skills*
>
> By the end of grade four, the immersion students and their English educated peers perform equivalently. By the end of grade five the immersion students often outperform the comparison groups on several aspects of measured English skills, for example, reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge.
>
> *Effects on Second Language Skills*
>
> The results reveal consistently superior performance in French skills as compared to students who have had a traditional program of French instruction. The results also show that the immersion students score as well on French proficiency instruments as 30% of the native-speaking students.
>
> *Effects on the Learning of Subject Content Material*
>
> On standardized tests given in English, science, social studies and mathematics, the immersion students who had been taught the subject matter in French, perform as well as their monolingual peers.
>
> *Other effects of Immersion Programs*
>
> Many studies show that bilingualism can positively influence aspects of cognitive and linguistic growth. (Cummins 1978.)

Parents become very enthusiastic when they see these research findings reflected in the achievement of their own children. They are proud of their children's abilities in a new language. Consequently, immersion schools have a very high degree of parent involvement. Parents choose this type of program for many reasons, but most often the reason given is that parents felt unsuccessful in learning a second language themselves and wanted to make sure that their children had a better chance of success. Milwaukee's immersion program has become so successful, for example, that there are long waiting lists for admission.

In response to questions about the kinds of children that enroll in immersion programs, the answer, based on immersion experiences in cities such as Milwaukee, San Diego, and Cincinnati is very simple: all kinds. Only a very small percentage of the students come from bilingual homes; close to half are members of racial or ethnic minority groups. The magnet-immersion programs draw students from every geographical sector and every socioeconomic group in the cities in which they are located. Parent interest is the only criterion for entrance into these programs.

Test scores from United States immersion programs have consistently shown the same good results as the research from Canada. For example, in Milwaukee's program, standardized achievement tests administered in English to students who have been taught in French, German or Spanish show that Milwaukee's immersion students score well above local and national averages in both language arts and mathematics. In the 1981 Metropolitan Achievement Test results,

students did so well that there were no students in the program who scored in the "low" category in any subject area. The 1982 and 1983 results on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills showed the same excellent results.

Teachers for immersion programs are not always easy to find. Staffing has been difficult because prospective teachers interested in second-language learning have traditionally gone into secondary education. What is required is an elementary teacher with native or near-native ability in the second language. There is no need for special certification in the second language, but there is a need for the teacher to have demonstrated proficiency in all aspects of the language.

Learning materials have also not always been easy to obtain. Curriculum materials in Spanish can be adapted from materials intended for bilingual education programs. French materials can be obtained from Canadian sources. Materials in German have proven to be most difficult, but Milwaukee's immersion program has made a good start in developing materials for grades kindergarten through six.

The question of costs of immersion programs is vitally important in these times of budgetary constraints. It would be difficult to implement any new program or methodology that appears to generate new costs. However, the experience of schools which have begun immersion programs has shown that the costs of immersion and non-immersion classes are similar. For example, curriculum materials (textbooks, workbooks, maps, etc.) are reordered each year, and the costs, whether for English or second-language materials, are comparable. No additional staff is required because the regular classroom teacher is also the "language teacher." The point is that a teacher and new books and materials are provided for every classroom, whether the teaching that goes on there is in English or a second language. Library books for second-language students do, however, constitute a "new" expense, and collections may need to be acquired gradually, over a number of years.

Of the three types of programs identified at the beginning of this discussion of innovations in U.S. elementary school foreign-language programs, immersion programs set the highest goals in terms of language proficiency. Students are expected to master the regular curriculum and also to become "functionally proficient" in the foreign language. This means that fifth and sixth graders should be able to communicate in the foreign language (on topics appropriate to their age) almost as well as 10- and 11-year olds for whom the language is native. It must be noted, however, that even though the children develop a functional proficiency, their second-language skills are not native-like with respect to all characteristics of grammar and vocabulary. In a report of research findings for immersion programs in Canada, Swain (1981) summarizes the distinction: "This does not mean that the children were unable to say what they wanted to, but they used the numerous strategies or techniques to say what they did not have the grammatical means to say." Further development of their second language skills is dependent upon interaction with native speakers of the language, either in or out of school.

The first immersion classes in the U.S. were started in Spanish in the Culver City Unified School District, with assistance from the University of California

at Los Angeles, in the fall of 1971. A group of 19 five-year-old monolingual English speakers were taught the kindergarten curriculum completely in Spanish. This program was modeled after the St. Lambert project in Montreal, Canada, in which English Canadians were immersed in French instruction from kindergarten (see Lambert and Tucker 1972). Definite patterns have emerged from the Culver City program. As in the case of the St. Lambert study, the English-speaking students acquired competence in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing Spanish, while maintaining English-language proficiency. These students also performed on a par with their English-speaking age group in content subjects such as mathematics and science (Cohen 1974).

Since the Culver City program began in 1971, other school systems have followed the lead in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Chevy Chase and Silver Spring, Maryland; Cincinnati, Ohio; Holliston, Massachusetts; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Orem, Utah; Rochester, New York; San Diego and Davis, California; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Washington, DC. The chart (on pages 164-165) of immersion programs in the United States shows languages offered, size of the program, type of program, and type of school. Some of the immersion schools came about as a result of desegregation efforts and became "magnet" schools which were designed to attract students from every part of the community because of the quality of the program that was being offered.

REVITALIZED FLES PROGRAMS

The second type of program popular today includes foreign languages taught before, during, or after school for a specific number of days per week. Instruction is begun in the elementary school and the opportunity is provided for continuing study of the same language through grade 12. Today's revitalized language classes emphasize spoken language more than such programs used to.

Foreign language in the elementary school (FLES) is a concept whose time has come...again. Popular in the 1960's, those years saw great public and government support of language learning at all levels of instruction, especially in primary and middle grades, a reaction due in large part to the shock of Sputnik and the sudden awareness that linguistic isolation had played a role in that technological setback. By the early 1970's, however, national attention and federal funding had clearly shifted to new priorities. FLES programs that had been developed at the peak of public enthusiasm declined abruptly for several reasons. Heading the list was the fact that foreign languages had been, in many cases, simply added to the elementary curriculum and never fully grafted onto it (Pesola 1982). Other contributing factors were: a lack of qualified teachers, a shortage of quality instructional material, a failure to create specific goals, parent demands for a return to the "basics," and the problem of articulation between elementary and secondary schools.

In spite of the failure of some FLES programs, other programs remained viable and functioning. In the climate of the 1980's where language competence in the United States is considered crucial, an opportunity has been created for a renewed and sounder rationale for languages in the elementary school. In this climate, revitalized FLES programs are becoming increasingly popular. These new programs carry with them a new set of goals--an emphasis on developing

Immersion and Partial Immersion Language Programs in U.S. Elementary Schools, 1982
Information compiled by the Center for Applied Linguistics
Elementary School Foreign Language Project
3520 Prospect Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20007
(202) 298-9292

School District/City	Comments	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Teachers	Languages	No. of Aides	Contacts
Alpine (UT) School District	-Started 1978 -Total immersion -Local funding only -Grades 1-5	1	104	4	Spanish		Janet G. Spencer, Principal Cherry Hill Elementary School 250 East 1650 South Orem, UT 84057 801/225-3387
Baton Rouge, LA LEA	-Started 1980 -Total immersion	1	60	4	Spanish French		Mrs. Ben Peabody, Sr. Principal La Belle Aire Elementary 12255 Tams Drive Baton Rouge, LA 70815 504/275-7480
Cincinnati (OH) Public Schools	-Started 1974 -Partial immersion -Total immers. in K -Local funding only -Articulation w/junior and senior high	4 Spanish 3 French 1 German 1 Middle Sch. 9 total	900 Spanish 480 French 580 German 430 Middle Sch. 2390 total	80 (approx. total)	Spanish French German	German - 1 Spanish - 1/2	Mimi Met Supervisor Cincinnati Public Schools 230 East 9th Street Cincinnati, OH 45202 513/369-4937
Culver City, CA	-Started 1971 -Total immersion -Magnet school -Local funding only	1	149 total	5 (full-time)	Spanish	Some parent volunteers	Eugene Ziff, Principal La Ballona Elementary School 10915 Washington Boulevard Culver City, CA 90230 213/839-4361, Ext. 229
Holliston, MA	-Started 1979 -Total immersion -Grades K-4 -Spanish partial immersion offered in middle school	1	99	3	French	1 full-time 1 part-time	James Palladino, Principal Miller Elementary School Woodland Street Holliston, MA 01746 617/429-1601
Milwaukee (WI) Public Schools	-Started 1977 -Magnet Schools -Begins with 4-yr. old kinder. -Total immersion -Articulation w/junior and senior high	2 total German K-6 French K-5 Spanish K-3	174 German 199 French 190 Spanish 30 Jr. High 593 total	20	German French Spanish	10	Helena Anderson Foreign Language Curriculum Specialist Milwaukee Public Schools P.O. Drawer 10K Milwaukee, WI 53201 414/475-8305
Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools	-French total immersion started at Four Corners Elementary and now continuing at Oak View -Small outside funding -Articulation with junior high: one subject course per year for former immersion pupils	1 French	172	7	French	1 position (college volunteers, occasionally parents), high school interns	Gabriel Jacobs, Principal Oak View Elementary School 400 East Wayne Avenue Silver Spring, MD 20901 301/589-0020
	-Spanish total immers. -Magnet school -Local funding only	1 Spanish	45-60	2 (Grades 1,2,3) (Grades 4,5,6)	Spanish		Louise Rosenberg, Principal Rock Creek Elementary School 8330 Grubb Road Chevy Chase, MD 20815 301/589-0005

(Continued)

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School District/City	Comments	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Teachers	Languages	No. of Aides	Contacts
Rochester, NY	-Started 1981 -Total immersion (except for English reading) -Grades 1-2 -Local funding only	2	48	2	Spanish		Alessio Evangelista Director, Foreign Language Dept. City School District 131 W. Broad Street Rochester, NY 14608 716/325-4560, Ext. 2315
San Diego (CA) City Schools	-Started 1977 -Total immersion for students who begin in grades K-2, partial for those who begin in grades 3-6 -Partial immersion for grades 7-12 -Magnet schools -Special funding in initial years; regular funding now	5 (Includes two secondary schools)	850 total	35 total	French Spanish	35 (native speakers)	Harold B. Wingard Curriculum Specialist, Second Language Education San Diego City Schools Linda Vista Elementary, K-8 2772 Ulric Street San Diego, CA 92111 714/569-9640
Tulsa (OK) Public Schools, Independent School District #1	-Started 1981 -Total immersion	1	26	1	Spanish	1	Jack Griffin Tulsa Public Schools Assoc. Supervisor for Instruction P.O. Box #45208 Tulsa, OK 74145 918/743-3381, Ext. 485
Washington, DC	-Started 1966 -Independent -Partial immersion -English/French, English/Spanish -Nursery through grade 12 -Pupils 85 nationalities; staff 35 nationalities -International baccalaureate	1	550	60 full-time equivalents	French Spanish		Dorothy Bruchholz Goodman, Director Washington International School 3100 Macomb Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20008 202/966-8510
Washington, DC	-Started 1971 -Partial immersion -Local funding only	1	330	11 Spanish 11 English	Spanish	1 (Pre-K)	Frank Miele, Principal Oyster Elementary School 29th and Calvert Streets, N.W. Washington, DC 20008 202/673-7277

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second-language speaking and listening skills and on developing each student's cultural awareness. The following guidelines (Pesola 1982) give an indication of the new directions in FLES.

1. The FLES student learns most effectively when language is presented in a meaningful communicative context: social/cultural situations, games, songs and rhymes, experiences with arts, crafts, sports.

2. Although grammar should not be ignored in FLES instruction, it is not the most useful organizing principle for instruction, nor should it be the object of instruction for its own sake.

3. Elementary and middle school children need to work with *concrete* experiences as the starting point of learning; thus considerable planning should go into the use of visuals, props and realia in the FLES classroom.

4. Planning should incorporate opportunity for physical movement and activity.

FLES classes are usually taught by a language-specialist teacher who meets students three to five days per week for 20 to 30 minutes per day. Such a specialist must have excellent language skills, especially in speaking, and must have skills in working with elementary children. Some FLES classes are taught by the classroom teacher with the support of a language specialist. Budget restrictions are a problem which must be overcome in programs with language specialists, because the salary of the language teacher is an additional cost.

Traditional FLES programs did not necessarily emphasize speaking skills, and parents were frequently disappointed if they expected that their children would be able to speak the language fluently after only three years of classes given two times a week. Parents are now told that the level of fluency their children will attain in a FLES program is a direct result of the amount of time spent using the foreign language. They are advised to set their expectations accordingly.

Interesting instructional material is an important part of today's FLES programs, and the lack thereof is still a problem that needs to be solved. The best solution to date has been teacher-prepared or school-district-prepared materials that meet the varying individual needs. Publishers of foreign-language textbooks need to become more aware of this market.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE (FLEX)

A third innovative approach, foreign language experience (FLEX), has also become popular in the 1980's. FLEX programs are self-contained, non-articulated programs designed to introduce elementary school students to language study on an informal basis. This approach usually has the following goals and purposes (Strasheim 1982).

1. An improved foreign-language program with increased strength at the beginning and reduced attrition throughout the sequence.

2. The development of motivation for language study through the building of a readiness for language learning, and giving the student an intelligent basis for the selection (or non-selection) of a language to study.

3. The mastery of a limited amount of language material, including all the major facets of language learning (i.e., grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary).

4. The development of greater interest in the world and its peoples, encompassing increased sensitivity to cultural similarities and decreased ethnocentrism as better preparation for life in a pluralistic society and world.

5. Awareness of the career uses for foreign-language skills.

Fluency in the target language is clearly not an objective in FLEX programs and this must be explained at the outset. However, because of the limited objectives of FLEX, many schools offer a sequence of short FLEX courses in different languages during one year. It is hoped this varied experience gives students a strong basis for choosing which language to study in the future.

One possible difficulty of this approach is that qualified FLEX instructors do not have to be fluent in the second language. In fact, in some school districts FLEX instructors with limited foreign-language study learn the foreign language right along with the students. This appears to be possible because the program strives only to introduce foreign languages and to make the initial learning experience pleasurable. Again, the program does not aim for student fluency but for an enthusiastic response to language learning in general together with the mastery of a limited body of material. It would seem that if the FLEX instructor has a positive, enthusiastic attitude toward language and language teaching, this might compensate for a lack of language proficiency.

The State of Indiana currently has a program in which classroom teachers learn the language right along with their students and begin to implement the program after a two-day training session. New FLEX self-instructional materials and tapes developed by the Indiana Department of Public Instruction are intended as an experiential enrichment component for the primary grades curriculum and are currently being tested in several school districts. The materials have been developed in French, Spanish, and German, and introduce the children to numbers, colors, parts of the body, and clothing. While some administrators may initially question classroom teachers' willingness to learn a language along with their students, Stockwell Elementary school administrators in Evasnville, Indiana, found overwhelming enthusiasm for the program.

In many school districts, FLEX is taught by high school or college students, parents, or other community members who have a background in foreign language and who will often volunteer their services. Usually, instructors and prospective instructors attend a short training program.

While results of the survey in these eight states indicate there is not yet total commitment to foreign-language study at the elementary school level, visits to schools were very encouraging. Foreign-language programs that do exist are successful and have a promising future. The enthusiasm of the parents, students, and administrators for these programs is overwhelming.

The trend toward clearly stating program goals should help alleviate some of the proficiency-expectation problems that plagued educators in the past when goals were not spelled out. Once the goals of the program are understood, increased satisfaction and less criticism should result. Now, parents and administrators can expect, for example, that children participating in a FLEX program will experience a basic exposure to the language being studied and to the corresponding culture. Children enrolled in a FLES program will be introduced to the basics of language, with emphasis on oral communication (and attention to reading and writing skills, in some programs). If the children are participating in a language-immersion program, they should be expected to become functionally proficient--to be able to communicate in the foreign language on topics appropriate to their age, and perform appropriately in all of the basic subjects of the curriculum.

Those who, as of a few years ago, felt that elementary foreign-language study was dead should take another look at what is currently going on in elementary schools. Immersion, and revitalized FLES programs, emphasizing spoken language, and foreign language experience programs are setting a new trend for the future. Schools that currently do not offer foreign languages need to recognize that learning a foreign language enriches a child's life. In today's world, every child can profit by learning the language and culture of other countries, and effective instruction in these two areas should be a basic goal in our elementary schools.[2]

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[2]For a free copy of the booklet *Foreign Language in the Elementary School: A practical Guide*, please write to: Elementary School Foreign Language Project, Center for Applied Linguistics, 3520 Prospect St. NW, Washington, DC 20007; (202/298-9292).

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